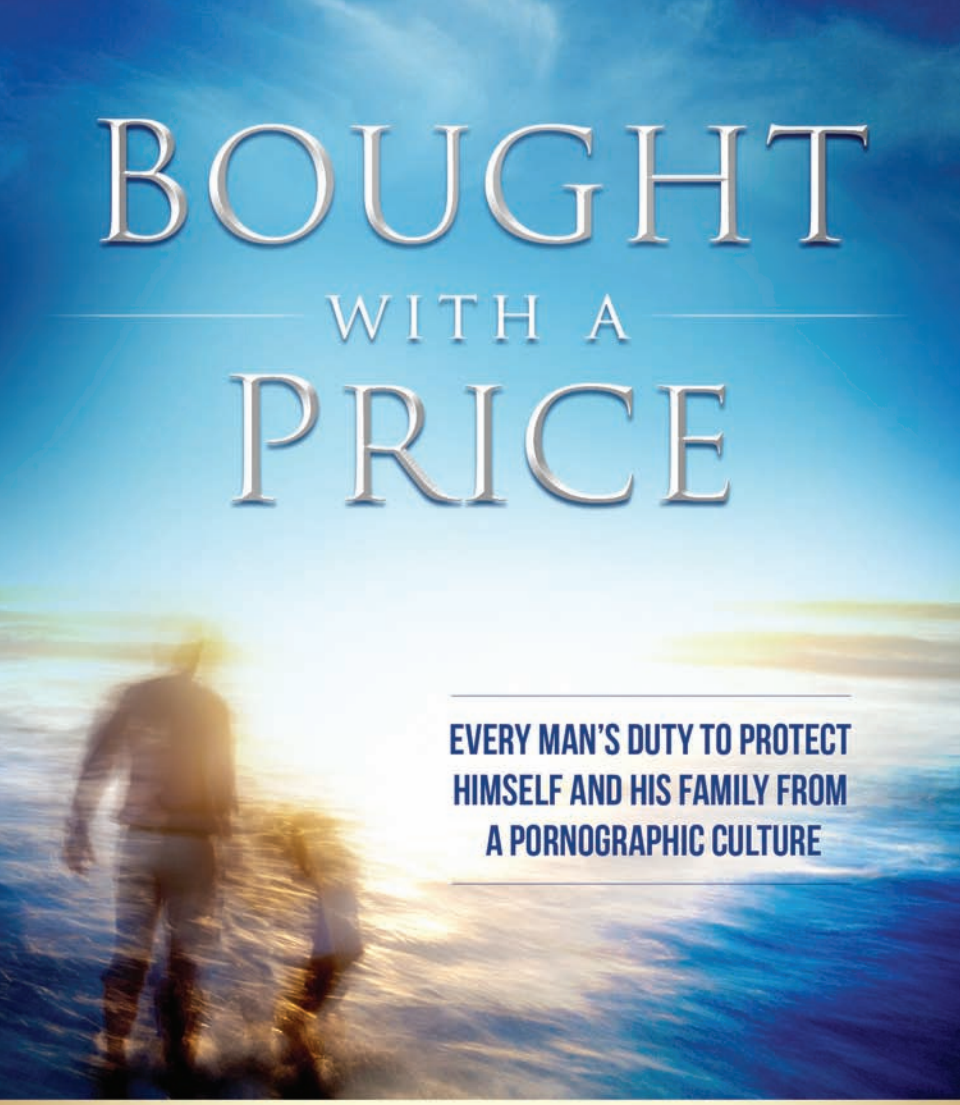
BOUGHT WITH A PRICE



EVERY MAN'S DUTY TO PROTECT HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY FROM A PORNOGRAPHIC CULTURE

MOST REV. PAUL S. LOVERDE
BISHOP OF ARLINGTON

Solemnity of Saint Joseph - March 19, 2014

Response to *Bought with a Price*

"I think if a person knew, that after viewing pornography, he would be a bad example for his kids, would objectify his spouse and friends, and lastly destroy his relationship and vision of God, he would not do it."
– High School Senior

"I am a senior in high school, and in my religion class we studied *Bought with a Price*. The letter helped me to realize the pervasiveness of pornography in our society and even in my own life. I had already grown so accustomed to the material that I no longer viewed it as pornography. Now I am training myself to avoid viewing this harmful material out of love for my future spouse and family, and out of love for God."
– High School Senior

"I know that the first way to protect my future family as a young woman is to find a faithful, life-loving man who feels the same way I do on using pornography—which, of course, is never!"
– Parishioner

"*Bought with a Price* has had a profound effect on my life and on my thinking about this issue, and has caused me to seek professional help in this area."
– Parishioner

"The letter was an eye opener and a blessing. I never considered that the same eyes that view this garbage were created to see the glory of God for all eternity. I intend to view excerpts of this letter whenever I am tempted to view immoral things."
– Parishioner

"I never before realized how much pornography can affect a father in his relationship with his spouse and children. You pointed out that the true father should protect his family at all cost. I now understand that the true character of a man is shown in how he acts when nobody is watching."
– Parishioner

"A masterful work. Thank you for speaking out so courageously yet sensitively. I particularly appreciated the way in which you expose the lies of pornography, the notion that it can be therapeutic, and that Christian opposition arises from a hatred of the body. This kind of deception is Satan's best tool. It is certainly not a hatred of the body on our part but an exaltation of the body's dignity in God's sight."
– Charles Colson (1931-2012)

Bought *with a* Price

Every Man's Duty to Protect Himself and His Family from a Pornographic Culture

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Most Rev. Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington

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March 19, 2014
The Solemnity of Saint Joseph

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My father entered eternity many years ago, but not a day goes by when I do not remember him. He loved Christ and was a faithful son of the Church. He and my mother knew few comforts, both working long hours in the textile mills to send me to the best schools. He sang in his native Italian around the home, tended the best garden in our neighborhood, and showed me in word and deed how to be a man.

On this Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Patron of Fathers, I give thanks for the loving witness of my father even as I turn to a matter of utmost urgency for every son and father today. To a degree that my father could never have imagined, today's father must protect himself and his children from the relentless assault of an increasingly pornographic culture; moreover, mothers share this sacred task. Every home now stands in the pathway of this attack on our children's innocence and purity. If we are not vigilant, our sons and daughters will pay a steep and heartrending price.

How I wish that this new edition of my pastoral letter, *Bought with a Price*, was unnecessary. How I wish that stories of porn addiction like Matt Fradd's—found in a new Foreword—never had to happen. And yet, since I first issued this letter nearly eight years ago, the porn epidemic engulfing our families, marriages and communities, has reached a pandemic scale. In light of this, I pray that Matt's powerful witness, the addition of practical takeaways, a study guide for individuals, groups, and families, and a plan of life, will be a timely and encouraging tool for purity and holiness of life.

"If you are really open to the deepest aspirations of your hearts," I echo the words of Pope Francis, "you will realize that you possess an unquenchable thirst for happiness, and this will allow you to expose and reject the 'low cost' offers and approaches all around you.... Have the courage to be truly happy! Say no to an ephemeral, superficial and throwaway culture, a culture that assumes that you are incapable of taking on responsibility and facing the great challenges of life!" (World Youth Day, 2013)

On this Solemnity of Saint Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary and foster father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I call on every man in the Diocese of Arlington to search his heart and renew his commitment to purity. I call on every husband and father to renew his sacred commitment to his wife and children. As you do, be assured of my prayerful support for each of you, and may God grant you His priceless gift of purity and peace.

Faithfully in the Heart of Christ,

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington

Foreword
By Matt Fradd

I was playing in a relative's garage, rummaging through an old trunk in the corner, when I found it: a glossy magazine picture of a completely naked woman. I gasped, and my heart seemed to stop—I had never seen anything like it. I felt a strong sense of awe, and also something like guilt. For although no one had ever told me I shouldn't look at pornography (I'd never even heard the word before), I somehow knew it was wrong. I also knew I wanted to see more. I was eight years old.

Though my first encounter with porn wounded the innocence of my childhood, more than two decades later there's something almost quaint about it. Today's kids don't have to stumble on faded centerfolds or sneak glimpses of late-night TV—they can tap a keyboard or screen and access a virtually infinite supply of graphic nudity and sex acts. They're awash in a sea of smut, and as our culture increasingly legitimizes, even glorifies it (or just defines it down), only heroic parental vigilance—plus God's providence—offers them any hope of escaping its influence.

As a U.S. Justice Department memo warned, "Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions." If that sounds about right, it will be sobering to consider that it was written in 1996—before wireless broadband, before iPads, before selfies and sexting. Before pornography took over twelve percent of the Internet, with more than 25 million sites today raking in over $5 billion a year. Before it was considered common practice, as it is today, for porn consumption to begin with a first encounter around age 11 and go on to radically shape the ideas that teens and young adults have about sexual intimacy.

This new edition of *Bought with a Price*, then, could not have come at a more critical time.

I'm sure that providence was watching over me as a boy, but my parents weren't vigilant enough. My friends and I began stealing pornographic magazines from the local shops, and soon I developed quite the stash. (When my father eventually discovered it, he just warned me, with a smirk, not to let my mother catch me.) My growing collection didn't sate my cravings, though, but only intensified them, and by my teen years the still images of *Playboy* weren't doing it for me anymore.

This is always the case with addiction, and neuroscientists are now explaining in scientific language what those of us who have been addicted to anything already knew: The addictive state leaves us in constant craving for a neurochemical cocktail (endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, etc.) that, with compulsive use, effectively re-sets the pleasure thermostat of our brain. The result is that alcoholics need more booze, drug addicts need bigger hits, and porn users need ever more intense kinds of sexual stimulation—just to feel "normal."

I would go on to discover a new and profound normality—in fact, reality—at 17, when I abandoned the agnosticism of my youth and came to Christ. Suddenly I knew I was loved; I knew that the people I interacted with day in and day out had intrinsic worth; that, whether they knew it or not, God had thought them worth the price of His blood. This rocked my world. I could no longer justify degrading and objectifying women for whom Christ had suffered and died. And so I made the first and most important decision anyone can make in recovery: I admitted I was wrong, that my actions were bad, that I needed to change.

I believe that any attempt to come to terms with why pornography is evil must begin with this recognition of the intrinsic worth and goodness of the human person. For if we did not have inherent dignity, how could anything we did to ourselves or others offend justice? Or if, as the Gnostics taught, the flesh was just a prison for the soul, not part of what we essentially *are*, why would it matter how we used our bodies—or others'? You can't cheapen what is already worthless.

This is why Catholic teaching on human sexuality, expressed so beautifully in the writings of Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body, offers a noble vision of humanity. It insists on the integrity of the whole person: soul and body. It calls the flesh good and valuable, first because God created it and holds it in being, but even more so because God united Himself to it in the Incarnation. As the *Catechism*, citing the early Christian writer Tertullian, puts it,

> 'The flesh is the hinge of salvation.' We believe in God who is the creator of the flesh; we believe in the Word made flesh in order to redeem the flesh; we believe in the resurrection of the flesh, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh.

Although my change of heart about pornography was a black-and-white moment, my recovery from porn addiction was not. It would take more time and healing to break free. After I got married, my wife's love and the grace of the sacrament helped deliver me completely. And, just as my initial conversion had done, the beauty of marriage and fatherhood also helped put the ugliness of porn into crystal-clear perspective. I came to understand how when husbands and fathers use porn they not only make themselves slaves to sin, they also deeply wound their ability to love and protect in the way their vocation demands.

C. S. Lewis wrote presciently of the man who "keeps a harem of imaginary brides" that prevents him from achieving loving unity with an actual woman:

> For the harem is always accessible, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments, and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions which no woman can rival. Among those shadowy brides he is always adored, always the perfect lover; no demand is made on his unselfishness, no mortification ever imposed on his vanity. In the end, they become merely the medium through which he increasingly adores himself.

This comports nicely with Pope Francis' admonition, from *Evangelii Gaudium*, that "Life grows by being given away, and weakens in isolation and comfort." I think of Christ's words from Luke 22:19 at the Last Supper—"This is my body which is given for you." Husbands and fathers have a special calling to imitate Christ in His self-giving sacrifice: in our work, in the way we love, in our patience and kindness.

But porn flips that on its head. It makes husbands and fathers say, "This is your body, taken by me." By turning men inward, pornography suffocates their vocation, robbing them of their power to be Christ-like lovers, protectors, and leaders of their families.

Most troubling of all, for both men and women (the latest studies show an alarming rise in porn use among the latter) pornography deadens the heart to spiritual things. *Bought with a Price* is full of wisdom and good counsel from beginning to end, but I think Bishop Loverde writes most urgently when he warns of the "damage that pornography does to man's 'template' for the supernatural." God gave us the earthly gifts of sight and sex and ordered them towards a heavenly end: everlasting life with Him. When we subvert use of those gifts, we lose interest in their true end. Our perspective gets stuck on earth and its low pleasures. Thus we endanger not just our temporal relationships but our eternal destiny.

That's the bad news—the worst news, in fact. The good news, as the bishop's bold and manful letter also tells us, is that healing is possible; purity can be achieved.

Perhaps you have been struggling to be free of pornography for a long time. Perhaps you've grown tired of promising yourself, your spouse, and God, that you'll never fall to this again, only to return—like the dog to its vomit (2 Pet. 2:22)—once more. *Bought with a Price* is a timely and urgent word which will, by God's grace, renew you and convince you once more that this is a battle worth fighting.

Remember, there is only one sin which God will not forgive. What is that sin? The one we refuse to ask forgiveness for. Be assured of God's love for you. Be assured of His infinite mercy. The same God who forgave Moses the murderer, Rahab the prostitute, David the adulterer, Peter the denier, and Paul the Christian-murderer will forgive you also, and convert your heart.

And there's even better news. Scripture promises that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). So we have here not just a struggle, but an opportunity to tap into a massive outpouring of God's grace. Think about it. Every person, every Christian, every saint who lived before the Internet lacked one gift that we have: the ability to choose Christ by rejecting, day after day, this uniquely modern and anonymous sin of porn. So let your heart not be troubled but grateful—for God's inexhaustible mercy, for the powerful help we get from the Church's sacraments and teachers like Bishop Loverde, and for this almost unprecedented chance to grow in virtue by striving to walk the path of purity.

Matt Fradd works for Covenant Eyes and is author of the book Delivered: True Stories of Men and Women Who Turned from Porn to Purity. *A speaker and Catholic apologist, Matt has produced many resources on pornography and purity, including* Porn: 7 Myths Exposed, The Ugly Truth, The Man Talk*, and* ThePornEffect.com. *He lives in Atlanta with his wife Cameron and their three children.*

Introduction

In my nearly fifty years as a priest, I have seen the evil of pornography spread like a plague throughout our culture. What was once the shameful and occasional vice of the few has become the mainstream entertainment for the many—through the Internet, cable, satellite and broadcast television, smart phones and even portable gaming and entertainment devices designed for children and teenagers. Never before have so many Americans been so tempted to view pornography. Never before have the accountability structures—to say nothing of the defenses which every society must build to defend the precious gift of her children—been so weak.

What was once the shameful and occasional vice of the few has become the mainstream entertainment for the many.

This plague stalks the souls of men, women and children, ravages the bonds of marriage and victimizes the most innocent among us. It obscures and destroys people's ability to see one another as unique and beautiful expressions of God's creation, instead darkening their vision, causing them to view others as objects to be used and manipulated. It has been excused as an outlet for free expression, supported as a business venture, and condoned as just another form of entertainment. It is not widely recognized as a threat to life and happiness. It is not often treated as a destructive addiction. It changes the way men and women treat one another in sometimes dramatic but often subtle ways. And it is not going away.

I know of this plague from my brother priests who routinely confront it in the confessional; from counselors who treat it through our various Catholic social service agencies; from Catholic school teachers, youth ministers, and religious education teachers who confront its effects in the lives of our youth; from parents who speak of the challenge of raising children with modesty in our culture; and from my involvement in the Religious Alliance Against Pornography, an interfaith coalition of religious leaders.

Yet this plague extends far beyond the boundaries of church or school. The victims of this plague are countless. Today perhaps more so than at any time previously, man finds his gift of sight and therefore his vision of God distorted by the evil of pornography.

The victims of this plague are countless.

As part of my responsibility to lead all the people in the Diocese of Arlington to the vision of God, I find it necessary once again to address the tremendous moral, social, and spiritual dangers of pornography. In so doing, I ask Catholics and non-Catholics alike to pause and join my reflections in this pastoral letter which will: 1) examine the nature of the current threat; 2) address the arguments put forward by those who attempt to rationalize pornography and provide "cover" for pornographers; 3) offer concrete counsel—to all Christians, young people, couples, and priests—on how to guard against pornography and to free oneself from its slavery and seek God's forgiveness; and finally, 4) reflect on the gift of sight and its fulfillment in divine contemplation.

NATALIE PLUMB

The Current Threat

Artists have often portrayed the human body, clothed and unclothed, in various depictions and poses. While the danger of immodesty exists even with regard to works of art, the evil of pornography is greater and more insidious. Pornography depicts the body solely in an exploitative way, and pornographic images are created and viewed only for the purpose of arousing sexual impurity. Hence the production, viewing and spread of pornography is an offense against the dignity of persons, is objectively evil, and must be condemned.

The production, viewing and spread of pornography is an offense against the dignity of persons.

In a culture that sees pornography as a mere private weakness or even as a legitimate pleasure to be protected by law, we must repeat here the Catholic Church's constant teaching. In simple terms, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* condemns pornography as "a grave offense" (CCC 2354).

The immorality of pornography comes, first of all, from the fact that it distorts the truth about human sexuality. "It perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other" (CCC 2354). Rather than being the expression of a married couple's intimate union of life and love, sex is reduced to a demeaning source of entertainment and even profit for others. Pornography violates chastity also because it introduces impure thoughts into the viewer's mind and often leads to unchaste acts, such as masturbation or adultery.

Pornography offends also against justice. "It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others" (CCC 2354). The "participants" are used and manipulated in ways incompatible with their human dignity. Everyone involved in the production, distribution, sale, and use of pornography cooperates and, to some degree, makes possible this debasement of others. Indeed, pornography has become a system and an industry of mutual degradation. That some may be willing participants in no way lessens the culpability of those who engage in the production and use of pornography.

Further, pornography represents a serious abuse of the means of communication, and, in that regard, is a violation of the eighth commandment. We must remember that the right to use the means of communication (i.e., freedom of speech) is not an absolute right. It must always be at the service of the common good. Civil authorities must ensure that the use of the means of communication be in accord with the moral law. To accomplish this, civil authorities "should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials" (CCC 2354).

I remind all the faithful, therefore, that the use of pornography—i.e., its manufacture, distribution, sale or viewing—is gravely sinful. Those who engage in such activity with full knowledge and complete consent commit a mortal sin. Such actions deprive them of sanctifying grace, destroy the life of Christ in their souls, and prevent them from receiving Holy Communion worthily until they have received absolution through the Sacrament of Penance.

The gravity of this sin becomes clearer when one considers the tremendous damage the use of pornography causes to society. It damages first of all the family, the basic cell of society and the Church, because it tears at the marital bond. Since it "immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world" (CCC 2354), a man's use of pornography turns his attention and affection away from his wife. It creates in his mind unrealistic and often immoral expectations for their intimate life. He begins

to approach her only as a means to his own gratification and no longer as his "suitable partner." Priests and counselors know very well how grave a threat pornography poses to marriage and how many families have already suffered sad division due to its effects.

Pornography's availability and intrusion injure the common good by producing a consumerist and licentious view of sexuality, particularly of women. Inculcating and guarding the precious virtue of chastity becomes increasingly difficult when pornography infects a majority of media outlets. Society's interest in preparing young men and women for marriage also suffers when the media presents as a mercantile plaything the holy act of intimacy that is proper to the sacred bond of marriage.

Our natural vision in this world is the model for supernatural vision in the next.

Perhaps worst of all, however, is the damage that pornography does to man's "template" for the supernatural. Our natural vision in this world is the model for supernatural vision in the next. Once we have distorted or damaged that template, how will we understand the reality? Our Lord has given us the gift of sight with the intention that we ultimately may see Him. The sinful use of this faculty both warps our understanding of it and—worse still—cripples our ability to realize its fulfillment in heaven. What man should use for receiving the true vision of God and the beauty of His creation, he uses instead to consume false images of others in pornography. How can we understand the supernatural sight God desires for us—i.e., the contemplation of God in the beatific vision—once our natural sight has been damaged and distorted?

Takeaway Pornography distorts the dignity of human sexuality, perpetuates violent and unjust practices, and corrupts our ability to see God and one another correctly.

Practice Educate yourself about the harm of pornography and the God-given gift human sexuality is intended to be.

Christians in a Secular World

Christians are intrinsically a people set apart. The reality of Baptism constitutes us as a community called into the desert, a people consecrated for relationship with the Creator of all things. Yet, like the people Israel who were called out of Egypt, members of the Church, too, find themselves inextricably tied to the same culture of death from which God has freed them.

> *"In the desert the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, 'Would that we had died at the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread!'" – Exodus 16:2-3*

It is not surprising, then, that we find ourselves assuming secular attitudes and becoming confused about the true nature of sin. This confusion becomes deadly when we use it to justify our own sinfulness, or seek to "define away" the evil nature of sins that tempt us. This is nowhere more evident than in the confusion that some Christians experience about the true nature of pornography.

Young Christians struggle to live the demands of discipleship amid the pressures of the surrounding culture. This process of integration becomes more difficult in a culture that, over the last generation, has abandoned the virtue of chastity.

Spouses—especially husbands—striving to grow in the fidelity inherent in their marital vocation, encounter temptations to escape and seek false comfort in images and fantasies.

Priests and religious, having committed themselves to a chaste and celibate life, find themselves in the midst of a culture that views celibacy as an impossible and even unhealthy goal. In moments of doubt, they may reach out for the false comforts of impurity. Their failure is all the more grave because of the scandal it brings to the Church.

Single men and women are distracted by these fantasies from their most important task of discerning God's call in their life. In moving from impure thoughts to images to actual sexual misconduct, they undermine the foundation of trust and fidelity required for future happiness.

No person living in our culture can totally separate himself or herself from the scourge of pornography. All are affected to a greater or lesser extent, even those who do not directly participate in the use of pornography. Yet if those who have given in to this vice were to answer honestly whether pornography made them happier or better persons, only the most dismissive would answer "yes." An honest assessment reveals that the use of pornography is debilitating spiritually, socially and emotionally.

Why then do so many give in to a temptation so obviously contrary to the good of the human person? At least in part, it is because of the doubt and confusion caused by the false arguments of those who justify this behavior. It is to these false arguments that I will now turn before offering counsel.

Takeaway We live in a culture with a gravely distorted understanding of human sexuality. It can be very difficult for Christians to recognize and reject sexual sin in such a culture, where pornographic images and themes have become so mainstream.

Practice Find at least one or two faithful Catholic friends in your life who can hold you accountable for living your faith in the context of authentic friendship.

Four False Arguments

1. "There are no victims, so no one is being harmed."

The justification of pornography often begins by viewing the activity as a private exchange between the viewers and those who produce and distribute the material. In this view, there is a "free" choice on the part of consenting adults to meet a "need" and to be compensated for meeting that "need." The illusion inherent in this rationalization is that all the participating parties complete the exchange as the same persons, with no harm done, as when they entered. Like all rationalizations, this is an illusion.

The first illusion is that the viewing of men and women in intimate relations does no harm to them as persons. Often this is not true on even a physical plane. Preying on the vulnerable and the needy, the pornography industry often entices them into deeper and more dangerous behaviors until physical harm is inevitable.

Yet the very nature of pornography commits violence against the dignity of the human person. By taking an essential aspect of the person—human sexuality—and making it a commodity to be bartered and sold, to be used and discarded by unknown others, the pornography industry commits a most violent attack on the dignity of these victims.

> *Eros*, reduced to pure "sex", has become a commodity, a mere "thing" to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great "yes" to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we

> are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere.
>
> – Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est, 5*

Every year, thousands of men and women are lured into the pornography industry by the promise of easy money. The industry preys on the most vulnerable: the poor, the abused and marginalized, and even children. This exploitation of the weak is gravely sinful. Whether need, confusion, or alienation leads men and women to become pornographic objects, their choice to do so certainly cannot be seen as free. Those who produce and distribute pornography leave a wide path of broken and devalued men and women in their wake.

The industry preys on the most vulnerable: the poor, the abused and marginalized, and even children.

More and more of these victims are younger, even children. When these, the most vulnerable and innocent of our society, become victims of the dehumanizing demands of an industry willing to destroy innocence for profit, it is an unspeakable act of violence.

Takeaway Pornography is not a private, victimless sin. It does serious harm to many people, including the person viewing it.

Practice Pray for victims of the pornography industry and for victims of human trafficking.

Dehumanizing the Viewer

> *"Jesus said in reply, 'Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh.'" – Matthew 19:4-6*

The guilty within the industry are easy to identify, but they do not stand alone. The entire pornography industry exists to realize profit, and there can be no profit without customers. Those who seek out and use pornographic images are active participants in the victimization of others. Those who view pornographic materials cannot separate themselves from the moral responsibility associated with the victimization and degradation of the men, women and children those materials depict. And the viewers themselves are degraded.

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It is a mistaken notion that the singular effect of sinful moral choices is the harm these choices cause to others. Certainly, the immediate effect of choosing to participate in pornographic viewing is the spiritual and emotional violence committed against those whose images are viewed. Yet, the personal and existential effect on the one choosing to view pornographic images lies at the heart of these sinful actions.

The human person, the only creature with a moral sense, progressively builds or destroys his or her character by each and every moral choice. Thus one becomes virtuous by the very act of practicing virtue, and one becomes depraved by practicing acts of vice. When one chooses to view pornography, even if at

first reluctantly, one becomes the kind of person who is willing to use others as mere objects of pleasure, disregarding their inherent dignity as a man or woman created in God's image. As the habit of pornography becomes more fixed, the characteristics of a person who debases and objectifies others and wills violence against their dignity become more pronounced.

It is in this sometimes gradual, sometimes sudden, transformation of the human character that sin exerts its strongest influence on individuals and the culture. The young more readily manipulate and abandon friends to meet their temporary and often selfish desires. Spouses begin to gauge their partner on a scale of what they receive from the relationship rather than to self-giving marital fidelity. Young adults approach marriage as merely a non-binding contract that may be abrogated if the benefits of the married state no longer meet their increasingly unrealistic or even perverse desires and expectations. Priests and religious judge their ministry on personal satisfaction and advancement rather than sacrifice. The widespread use of pornography naturally leads to a degradation of human society because it degrades the persons who submit to it.

The human person…progressively builds or destroys his or her character by each and every moral choice.

Pornography makes a lie of intimacy. Distorting that very human characteristic that promises an end to isolation, pornography leads the user not to intimacy, but to even deeper isolation. The divine purpose of human sexuality is to assuage the longing for communion with another and to bring the person into a bond of life-nurturing, and life-giving, love. In this human experience of intimacy with another, man's eternal destiny of perfect communion with his Creator is prefigured.

The false promise of intimacy offered by pornography leads instead to an ever-deeper alienation that cripples the user's ability to experience truly intimate human contact. The user of pornography, while longing for intimacy, turns ever more surely back into himself, becoming ever more isolated and alone.

Takeaway Pornography leads users into a fantasy world that isolates them and cripples their ability to experience true human intimacy. Every instance of it contributes to the dehumanization of many.

Practice Examine those areas of your life where you get pulled away from relationships and into fantasy worlds—pornographic or not—and work on developing deep, authentic friendships.

Erosion of the Family

The most tragic and frightening victim of the scourge of pornography is the family. Although the "intimacy" promised by this vice is illusory and the happiness sought in its practice is transitory and destructive, the damage to the human relationships so necessary for the flourishing of the family is even more shockingly real and, in many cases, permanent.

The flourishing of the family is dependent upon the growth of family members in holiness and true human love. This is a love whose primary concern is for the good of the other. It is in this experience of human love that children grow in grace and wisdom and become integrated and virtuous members of human society. True human love does not arise from selfish desire but rather from self-giving. It is in the example of self-giving expressed by loving parents that children develop the potential to commit to intimacy with another and to intimacy with God.

When family members turn to pornography in a distorted thirst for intimacy, they turn against and in some measure reject their commitment to their family. By doing this, they commit violence against the relationships which define their own vocation.

> If the person is not master of self—through the virtues and, in a concrete way, through chastity—he or she lacks that self-possession which makes self-giving possible. Chastity is the spiritual power that frees love from selfishness and aggression. To the degree that a person weakens chastity, his or her love becomes more and more selfish, that is, satisfying a desire for pleasure and no longer self-giving. – Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality (1995), 16*

The flourishing of the family is dependent upon the growth of family members in holiness and true human love.

Once given over to this vice, the family member makes great efforts to keep this betrayal secret. Ultimately, however, it is vain to expect that a secret that distorts the core of human sexuality can fully remain a secret from those to whom we have pledged our love and our lives. The betrayal, even if not made completely known, will communicate itself through changes in the character of the betrayer. In the isolation and alienation of the person, the other members of the family feel the inevitable consequences of the alienation of intimacy inherent in the secret of pornography.

The first to feel the violence of pornographic use is the spouse. If pornography is a sin against the human dignity of those whose images are used, how much more so is it a sin against the human dignity of the one who was promised the exclusivity of affection?

The use of pornography is a violation of the commitment of marriage. Even if tolerated by the spouse, how can one possibly not feel rejection and betrayal when one's committed partner turns to illusion and fleeting happiness in pornographic images? This rejection, if left unhealed, will often lead to the permanent destruction of the marital commitment.

The first to feel the violence of pornographic use is the spouse.

As is the nature of all sin, the ones who suffer the most are the innocent. Children who naturally strive to imitate and integrate the self-giving love of their parents instead find themselves faced with tension, betrayal and selfishness. It is understandable then that they may come to believe that true love, a sacrificial and self-giving love, is an illusion.

Just as it is a vain hope for a spouse using pornography to keep this sin a secret, it is also a vain hope to think that the material itself can be kept a secret. Children encounter the very material that has caused damage to their family and are introduced to an understanding of sexuality not intended by their parents. Instead of learning and experiencing the nobility of the human person created in the image and likeness of God, they experience the degradation of the human person reduced to a commodity, to an object.

Takeaway Pornography usage violates the commitment of marriage and can destroy families.

Practice Schedule regular times for family prayer, such as a family rosary in the evening. Frequently renew your commitment to your spouse before God.

2. "The temperate use of pornography can be therapeutic."

Some assert the position that acting sexually, in general, and the use of pornography, in particular, meets the most basic of human needs. This position posits that pornography can provide a modicum of human satisfaction and comfort for those who find intimacy in marriage impossible or at least unavailable. Examples are cited of spouses separated by distance, single men and women not yet able to marry, husbands and wives suddenly deprived of marital intimacy owing to age or illness. In each of these cases, the attainment of some level of human (i.e., sexual) satisfaction, even if inferior to true marital intimacy, is offered as a temporary relief to a person longing for human contact.

The use of pornography damages the very human qualities that make intimacy possible…

This view presupposes that sexual activity alone, or the viewing of others in sexual activity, is somehow of the same nature as true human intimacy. In fact, the intimacy longed for by all persons is the antithesis of the exploitative and dehumanizing experience of the use of pornographic images. Rather than providing comfort or satisfaction, the use of pornography inevitably leads not only to repeated unsatisfying experiences, but demands an escalation of stimulation. Each escalation and each experience demeans and desensitizes the viewer to the beauty and nobility of the human person.

Rather than provide some touch of human intimacy, the continued use of pornography limits the person's possibility, and even the ability, to attain intimacy with another person. How is

it possible to enter into a relationship of love and respect when the preparation for this human encounter is solely based on carnal "need"? How can the trust necessary for true intimacy be achieved if actions are determined by secret desires? The use of pornography damages the very human qualities that make intimacy possible: specifically respect, trust and the willingness to sacrifice for the other.

The same persons who portray the meeting of biological needs as intimacy also portray faithfulness as a sacrifice too onerous for fulfillment. All married couples will face times when marital intimacy is not possible. For some, these times may be prolonged. To pose such deprivation as an excuse for the use of the pornographic is to cheapen the promise of faithfulness upon which any marriage is founded. To embrace pornography as a substitute for marital intimacy is a tacit admission that the spouse is a means to meet biological "needs" rather than a partner in the communion of human love.

There cannot be a "temperate" use of pornography, just as there cannot be a "temperate" use of hatred or racism.

Some struggle with compulsive and occasional obsessive temptations to impurity. In a mistaken attempt to control these temptations, they may turn to the use of pornography as a "lesser evil." This use of pornography is wrongly justified as a "safety valve" allowing for the satisfaction of these compulsive desires in a way that is not harmful, as it only involves the individual. This rationalization misunderstands the true damage of sin. While providing seeming relief from temptations, the use of pornography by these individuals only provides further fuel for their obsessive impulses.

In a similar way, some struggle with temptations that are dangerous and destructive: same-sex attraction, attraction to young persons and sadistic fantasies. In the hope of maintaining these temptations in secrecy, these persons often resort to pornography as a means of controlling impulses. This deception will feed, rather than subdue, temptations. The discontinuity between the public and the private self widens to the point where fantasy can no longer be separated from reality. In fact, it is often the use of this "fetish" pornography that solidifies the temptation rather than relieving it. The repeated use of pornographic images and fantasies transforms the temptation into a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. The one who turned to pornography to escape a temptation becomes the embodiment of that temptation. There cannot be a "temperate" use of pornography, just as there cannot be a "temperate" use of hatred or racism. To pose such a possibility is to accept giving in to evil one step at a time. Any seeming relief will be fleeting and the long-range consequences will make future resistance even more difficult, possibly escalating into an addiction.

Takeaway Pornography is not a healthy way to cope with temptation, nor a healthy way to relax. It feeds and perverts sexual desire, closing the user in on himself.

Practice Realize that using pornography is always destructive. If you are struggling with intense sexual temptation, seek out a spiritual director or a therapist who affirms the full truth of our sexuality as taught by the Church.

3. "Pornography can be an aid in maturing, both emotionally and sexually."

Often the use of pornography is seen as a "natural" part of the maturing process, a means by which the young come to understand themselves as sexual persons. Parents, possibly remembering their own struggles, may turn a blind eye to the use of pornography by their children. Rather than encouraging the young to gain self-mastery and self-respect, this view presents the young with a future that is dependent on whim and opportunity.

By its nature, pornography encourages an expression of human sexuality that is not only deformed but also severely limited and patently false. The use of pornography by young people prevents an understanding of human sexuality integrated with the self-expression and intimacy that is the full expression of the human person. Instead of growing to an appreciation of the sacredness of the person, young people caught in the web of pornography begin to relate to others and themselves as objects.

Self-mastery is an essential element to emotional security.

Self-mastery is an essential element to emotional security. Without the self-mastery that comes from controlling and, when necessary, struggling with one's destructive behaviors, including pornography, maturing young persons find themselves in the fearful condition of being unable to control either the world or themselves. A young person who has abandoned the hope of self-control is also unable to control what he does to others.

Pornography cannot aid in gaining maturity because all it offers is a lie about the human person: that a person can be exploited. The use of pornography by the young makes their authentic sexual and emotional development more difficult because of the false presentation of human interaction. Young people must be counseled to strive for the maturity of self-control and modesty and so become fully integrated persons, respecting both themselves and others.

Takeaway Pornography is not a natural part of the maturing process, but an impediment to it. Mastery of one's passions is key to personal, emotional, and spiritual growth.

Practice Practice self-denial and self-mastery. Cut back on TV, Internet use, or video games. If cable TV is an occasion of sin, discontinue the subscription. Incorporate the practice of fasting into your life.

4. "Christian opposition to pornography comes from the Christian hatred of the body."

> *"Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body." – 1 Corinthians 6:18-20*

Those who defend the "free speech" rights of pornographers often present the Church's defense of purity as puritanical rather than pastoral. Defenders of this criminal enterprise pose as defenders of a true humanism, portraying Christian teaching on chastity as "anti-human." The Church is presented as hating the human body and so reacting against human nature.

Our recognition of the body as an integral part of the human person is the foundation of Christian chastity.

This lie has been restated so many times through the long history of the Church that many accept it as central to Christian thought. In fact the exact opposite is true. The Church has always condemned a dualistic understanding of spirit as good and the body as evil. God created all things, both spirit and matter, and saw that all these things were good (cf. Genesis 1). It is the resurrection of the body that is our hope, and our recognition of the body as an integral part of the human person is the foundation of Christian chastity.

The Church does not pose an opposition of body and soul but rather the necessary completeness of both body and soul for a true and life-affirming wholeness. Far from denigrating the human body and treating human sexuality as an evil thing, the Church affirms the sacredness of the body. Because of this sacredness, the marital act is recognized as having a sacramental and sacred character that the Church seeks to protect.

Supporters of pornography, on the other hand, do advocate such a dichotomy of body and soul. When one views the body as something of no consequence to the person, one has little regard for how the body is portrayed. The presumption is that the body is something apart from the person and so of no lasting consequence.

Takeaway The Church affirms the sacredness of the body and of human sexuality. This is the reason for her firm opposition to pornography, which denigrates the body even as it reveals it in ever more graphic ways.

Practice Avoid movies, television shows, and websites that portray the body as an instrument of selfish pleasure. Learn about the Theology of the Body as taught by Saint John Paul II.

What Can Be Done

Public officials have a responsibility to uphold and ennoble the standards of the communities that they serve. Protecting a multi-billion dollar criminal enterprise which destroys the lives of both those depicted in pornography and those intended as audience through the excuse of protecting free speech is not service, but complicity. Public officials must work tirelessly to pass and enforce laws that contribute to a culture that respects the lives of all citizens.

This criminal enterprise known as the pornography industry is a crime against the helpless and the disaffected…

This criminal enterprise known as the pornography industry is a crime against the helpless and the disaffected on whom it preys and an affront to a civilized populace. The continued toleration of this insidious toxic poison that hides itself under the guise of freedom of speech and freedom of conscience is contributing to the debasement of our culture and the victimization of our own children.

Free citizens have the right and the responsibility to form a culture that supports the life and the dignity and nobility of every person. Citizens should unite to demand laws that place reasonable restrictions on the depiction of the human body and human intimacy.

Where the pornographic mentality has invaded even mainstream media—and certainly, what is now offered on cable and even broadcast television increasingly approaches pornographic content—citizens must demand that public officials whose service is to regulate such media take immediate and effective action. Contrary to the self-serving defense of some media outlets, such actions are not censorship, but rather the demand for an end to the exploitation of persons and the degradation of public morality.

Takeaway We have the right to live in a society that supports the full dignity of the human person. We should demand that public officials take action against pornography for the common good.

Practice Educate yourself on political and legal efforts to regulate the pornography industry, and call on your political representatives to enact better safeguards to protect children from pornography.

Counsel for all Christians

> *"Be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like lights in the world." – Philippians 2:15*

Christians should not be surprised to find themselves part of a culture that, in many ways, is contrary to the Gospel and repellent to Christian virtue. It was the same in the time of Saint Paul, and in some sense, for every generation of believers. But Christians of every generation are called to live in conformity with the truth of Jesus Christ and to stand apart from those aspects of culture that are contrary to this truth. A most effective way in which believers can combat the plague of pornography is by the witness of their lives.

Christians…are called to live in conformity with the truth of Jesus Christ.

Culture is formed by the choices of free people. It is important that we choose morally uplifting and life-affirming pursuits that contribute to the common good and the flourishing of all persons. Within one's capabilities, each person should make every effort to contribute healthy and chaste entertainments that can be shared by all. In the fields of art, literature and music, we must never compromise our own Christian dignity to suit the expectations of a decadent culture.

Form close bonds of Christian friendship in order to receive mutual support and affirmation. When appropriate, use these friendships to explore and shape the culture around you. It is in these bonds of friendship and family that authentic human intimacy can in fact be found.

Christians today live in an age unprecedented for the ability to communicate and find information. Through television, film, wireless communication and the Internet, we find ourselves with almost unlimited information at our fingertips at any time of the day or night.

Sadly, a great amount of the information available on the Internet is pornographic in nature. Some will find this instant access to impure images a temptation difficult to overcome. Do not justify the presence of a snake in the home for the benefits it may bring. We must remember our moral obligation not to place ourselves knowingly or deliberately in the occasion of sin. The inconvenience of losing instant access to information will be far outweighed by the ability to live an integrated and pure life. The best defense against pornography is to stop it before it starts—even if that involves sacrificing some otherwise neutral technology use.

The best defense against pornography is to stop it before it starts…

But if you already have or are using pornography, your spiritual growth will be impossible without an honest admission of guilt and reconciliation. All Christians should avail themselves of the grace of the Sacrament of Penance and make this sacrament of mercy the cornerstone of the struggle against pornography.

Finally, never underestimate the efficacy of Christian prayer. Pray for the victims of pornography, that their precious human dignity may be healed and restored. Offer concrete acts of penance through spiritual works and fasting for those who manipulate others in this crime of pornography, and who share in the complicity of its distribution. Through these acts of reparation, offer to God an acceptable sacrifice pleasing in His sight.

Entrust the Church, that is, the Community of Christ's Disciples, always to the protection of Saint Joseph:

> O Saint Joseph, you were chosen by God to be the foster father of Jesus, the most pure spouse of Mary, ever Virgin, and the head of the Holy Family. You have been chosen by Christ's Vicar as the heavenly Patron and Protector of the Church founded by Christ. Protect the Holy Father and all bishops and priests united with him. Dear Saint Joseph, be my father, protector, and guide in the way of salvation. Obtain for me purity of heart and a love for the spiritual life. After your example, let all my actions be directed to the greater glory of God, in union with the Divine Heart of Jesus, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and your own paternal heart. Finally, pray for me that I may share in the peace and joy of your holy death. Amen.

Make this sacrament of mercy the cornerstone of the struggle against pornography.

Takeaway The sacraments, prayer, and authentic friendship are essential weapons against pornography and all serious sin. We need one another to become stronger disciples of Christ.

Practice As I suggested in *Go Forth with Hearts on Fire*, look for a men's or women's group, Bible study, or prayer group to join so that you can be supported as a disciple and, at the same time, support other disciples.

Counsel for Young People

"Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity."
– 1 Timothy 4:12

I turn with particular concern to my young brothers and sisters in Christ. I fear that the full burden of our culture's surrender to pornography will fall on your shoulders, both now and in years to come. Not only have you been targeted by this criminal enterprise as a source of financial gain, but you also have to endure the impoverished notion of intimacy that results from a culture that has confused love with self-gratification. Know first that God has destined you for a true and fully human love that finds its center not in manipulating others but in sharing and flourishing in a communion with your beloved.

God has destined you for a true and fully human love.

Many in society have accepted the false expectation that youth cannot control their natural desires and practice the virtue of chaste intimacy. This belief—that it is unpractical or even unnatural to avoid impurity and the indulgence in pornographic fantasy—is a lie and far from the mind of the Church. The acceptance of this lie of immaturity becomes the excuse for ignoring the vital importance of strengthening the virtues of modesty and chastity so central to your future happiness.

The growth of intimacy that is at the heart of the experience of youth begins in the family. Here, in the mystery of human love and sacrifice, you first begin to explore the joy of intimacy and trust. In the sacred community of the family, you learn that your worth is not dependent upon your usefulness or your success, but upon the fact that you are valued as an irreplaceable and

sacred person. It is also in this sacred community of the family that forgiveness, so central in our struggles against sin, is learned and first practiced.

Remember always your important role in the community of your family. Respect your parents' God-given role in guiding your life. Cooperate in their efforts to ensure your safety and guide your decisions. This is most important in your decisions to use various media and take part in recreational activities. As you develop a healthy sense of privacy, do not be misled into embracing secrecy. Privacy is the healthy and necessary understanding that parts of your experience—your thoughts, dreams and aspirations—are uniquely your own and so should be shared only when you decide to share in intimacy. Secrecy, however, is the enemy of intimacy and does violence against the bonds of family. Secrecy is a rejection of love.

Your worth is…dependent upon the fact that you are valued as an irreplaceable and sacred person.

Look to your brothers and sisters and remember your responsibility towards them. If they are older, encourage them with your praise of their success. Remind them that you wish to imitate them in their virtue. If they are younger, assist your brothers and sisters, using the experience you have gained in your own struggles.

> *"Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you." – 1 Peter 3:15*

Growing in intimacy does not end with the family. For youth, the development of the bonds of intimate friendship marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adult life. The forming of these friendships exerts a great desire for acceptance and

belonging. Often described as "peer pressure," these expectations of friends are not only a source of temptation to experiment with destructive behavior, but also an opportunity to share things of true and lasting value. Resist giving in to the sharing of impure images from a desire to gain such acceptance. Reject the easy path of impure talk, immodest dress and pornographic entertainment. Be ready to explain to your friends why you have chosen to avoid this evil. Offer instead the example of self-mastery. Just as the self-mastery displayed in athletics, music, and academics draws natural admiration from peers, so too will self-mastery in purity draw admiration from friends who are facing the same uncertainties and temptations.

Be persistent in your goal and turn calmly from your temporary defeat.

Any human struggle, including the struggle for purity and modesty, comes with the possibility of failure. It is often through failure and the persistence to succeed that mastery is achieved. You must not become disheartened if you should succumb to the temptations that surround you. Be persistent in your goal and turn calmly from your temporary defeat. Young people have a great affinity for the Sacrament of Penance. Because of your innate understanding of the tragedy of failure, young people naturally long for a means of returning to a state of grace. Take advantage of the opportunity of reconciliation. Participate in the Sacrament of Penance regularly.

Remember that God has created you for perfect intimacy with Himself. Your struggle against sin—whether involving pornography or other temptations of life—is actually your preparation for this true intimacy for which your loving Father has created you. In whatever vocation to which the Lord invites you, your successful battle against impurity will contribute to the true happiness that will be found in the intimacy of that call.

Feel always confident to turn for assistance in these struggles to beloved Saint Joseph, the true spiritual father of us all:

> O loving father Saint Joseph who watched over and protected the Infant Jesus as He grew in grace and wisdom, watch over me, my family and my friends as we struggle to lead a life of love and friendship. Pray that I may be an example of a true disciple of your beloved Son and that all my thoughts, words and actions may be an inspiration to those whom I love. May I long to look to you as an example of true human intimacy and to treat others with respect and courtesy, thinking always of the good of others rather than the pleasure of self. Defend me against the temptations of impurity and allow me to serve as an example of modesty and chastity. Guide me on my journey that I may discover the vocation for which God has created me and in this vocation discover the joy that you experienced in your most Holy Family. Amen.

Remember that God has created you for perfect intimacy with Himself.

Takeaway Everyone is capable of self-mastery and chastity. One should not be discouraged by failure but continue to press forward, mindful of Christ's mercy.

Practice Make frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance. One who struggles with pornography should identify those times in the day when temptation is most likely and devote that time to prayer instead. Seek support and accountability.

Counsel for Married and Engaged Couples

> *"So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body." – Ephesians 5:28-30*

The true guardian and caretaker of the unique dignity of human persons is the family, and most particularly husbands and wives, who are custodians of the sacredness of life. Pornography not only poses a danger for the promise of faithfulness that is the fundamental element of the marriage bond, but also threatens the moral and sexual development of children whose nurturance is entrusted to the watchful care of parents. Husbands and wives are the most immediate and direct combatants in the struggle against pornography.

Strive to bring honor to the promise you made at the beginning of your married life.

While husbands and wives share equal dignity as persons, they do not share temptations equally—especially the temptations associated with the scourge of pornography. It must be admitted that the use of pornography is largely, although certainly not exclusively, associated with males. If a marriage begins to be damaged by pornography, the husband will most likely introduce it.

Husbands, be aware that your solemn promise of faithfulness, which is the foundation of the formation of your family, is damaged by any use of pornography. Strive to bring honor to the promise you made at the beginning of your married life. The times where intimacy is difficult are opportunities to practice the sacrificial love of a spouse that only your noble vocation illustrates most perfectly.

Seeking comfort in the illusion of pornography will incrementally corrupt your understanding of self, your perception of your beloved wife, and the model you present to your children. It is futile to believe that this secret preoccupation can be contained and isolated from family life. In small ways, the self-centeredness and disrespect of self and others, which lie at the heart of this vice, will become manifest within your relationships with your family.

Wives who find that their husbands have entered into a sinful attraction to pornographic images or stories must be loving and forgiving, but also stern in calling the spouse to return to his true manly vocation of marriage. Pornography means, in essence, that your husband is cheating on you. This betrayal of a spouse over a mere illusion is a bitter experience, yet one whose most sure antidote is love, support and counsel.

It is the duty of both parents, but in a special way the father, to protect your children from pornography.

The field of psychological counseling, when in keeping with the proper understanding of the human person and natural law, can also be of great assistance. Many have found themselves incapable of struggling against impurity alone, and that the assistance of a counselor or a therapist has made a sizable (sometimes the decided) difference.

Husbands and wives must practice constant vigilance to ensure that the plague of pornography does not enter into the lives of their children. It is the duty of both parents, but in a special way the father, to protect your children from pornography. This vigilance begins with a prudential control of media available in the home. Encourage the use of uplifting and positive magazines, films and books. When exercising parental controls

over media, provide children with understandable standards and moral reasons for recommending and rejecting media content. Always be clear and consistent when explaining these standards and demonstrate their importance by accepting the same standards for yourself.

Insist on strict and clear controls on any child's use of the Internet. Internet use in the home should always take place in family areas. Children, even older children, should not be provided Internet access in the privacy of their rooms. Technology controls on both computers and television should be a routine part of family media use.

Most importantly, husbands and wives provide the clearest and surest teaching of chastity through the love, devotion and self-sacrifice they display in their relationship one to the other. Recall always that the Lord has entrusted to you by your very life together the perfect means to bring children to a true and mature understanding of human intimacy.

Entrust each other and your children always to the care of the perfect spouse, Saint Joseph:

> O most provident guardian of the Holy Family, defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ. Most beloved father, dispel the evil of impurity and sin. Our most mighty protector, graciously assist us from heaven in our struggle with the powers of darkness. And just as you once saved the Child Jesus from mortal danger, so now defend this family from the snares of her enemies and from all adversity. Shield each one of us by your constant protection, so that, supported by your example and your help, we may be able to live a virtuous life, to die a holy death, and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven. Amen.

Takeaway When a married person uses pornography, it corrupts the marriage and will harm the children.

Practice Put strict limits on your children's Internet, tablet, or smartphone use and consider ways to "unplug" for the good of your family life. Re-examine your own use of technology and what you are allowing into your home.

Counsel for Priests

> *"Let those who wait for you, Lord of hosts, not be shamed through me. Let those who seek you, God of Israel, not be disgraced through me." – Psalm 69:6*

I now turn to my brothers in Christ, my brother priests, who must take up the serious task of leading the Christian people in their struggle against the evils of pornography. We who have been called to share in the sacred priesthood of Christ must also come to share in His purity. This is a lifelong and loving task that should bring us much joy and great humility. As we give praise and glory to God in our successes in this ministry, so must we also repent and do penance for our own failures and the failures of our brothers.

As priests, we find ourselves immersed in a culture that is often diametrically opposed to the virtues. While being students of the culture so that we may become more capable of evangelizing, we must be always alert lest we find ourselves being overwhelmed by the very elements we wish to banish.

You and I are celibate men for the Kingdom of God. This tremendous gift of celibacy is an invitation to the intimacy that Christ shares with His Church. We must always embrace this gift with joy and grow in the self-giving love that is our

inheritance. Submission to the lures of pornography is a serious sin against the gift of celibate chastity.

If any priest should find himself a party to this sin, he should seek assistance from his bishop or religious superior. Such failure does not necessarily mean the end of one's ministry. I would want to assist you in obtaining the spiritual, psychological and sacramental healing that will be necessary for a return to your labors.

All priests must be part of ongoing and frequent spiritual direction. These encounters with your director are a precious and intimate opportunity to hear the voice of the Master and to respond to His will. Conversations with directors must always be frank and complete, hiding nothing of the frustrations and temptations of your ministry and revealing all your faults. Humble acceptance of direction is a sure defense against the dangers of impurity.

No priest can be an adequate minister of reconciliation without being a frequent seeker of absolution. Priests must practice frequent confession in the Sacrament of Penance. Delaying or diminishing the importance of confession is a sign of an unrepentant heart.

All priests should be accountable for their private actions as well as their public ones. Indeed, as ministers of Christ, no action is truly private except for your personal prayer, and even the fruits of this should be frankly discussed with your director. Never allow yourself to form a private life that is secret from your brothers. Priests must be especially diligent in this area when it comes to the use of modern technologies of communication. I encourage every priest to make himself accountable to his brother priests in the use of these technologies.

Finally, I would ask that all priests commend themselves to Saint Joseph, the exemplar of fatherhood, and to pray most frequently for his intercession both for yourself and for your brothers:

> O Saint Joseph, who carried the Infant Jesus in your blessed arms and who, during the space of thirty years, lived in the most intimate familiarity with Him, take under your powerful protection those whom He has clothed with His authority and honored with the dignity of His priesthood. Sustain me in my fatigue and labors; console me in my pains; fortify me in my combats; but above all, keep far from me all the evils of impurity. Obtain for all my brothers the humility of Saint John the Baptist, the faith of Saint Peter, the zeal and charity of Saint Paul, the purity of Saint John and the spirit of prayer and recollection of which you, my dear Saint, are the model, so that, after having been on earth, the faithful dispensers of the Mysteries of your Foster Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, we may in Heaven receive the recompense promised to pastors according to the Heart of Christ. Amen.

Takeaway As icons of Christ, priests have a special responsibility to lead their flocks in the struggle against pornography.

Practice Find ways to enjoy the fraternal support of your brother priests, and make that a priority of your priestly life.

The Gift of Sight

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."
– Matthew 5:8

Amidst the suffering and pain caused by the evil of pornography, we are called to be a people of hope, to behold the image of God in others, and to restore our use of sight by focusing on the goal of our faith and the final end of our sight.

The Church has always described heaven as the contemplation of the Lord face to face. "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Our Lord speaks these words at the beginning of His public ministry. Thus He Himself reveals the connection between the virtue of purity and the faculty of sight. As the Catechism explains this Beatitude, "purity of heart is the precondition of the vision of God" (CCC 2519).

This Beatitude describes first an essential characteristic of the blessed, of those who have entered "into the joy of the Trinitarian life" (CCC 1721): they are pure of heart. This description serves also as a moral exhortation: we are to seek such purity of heart. In a general sense, purity of heart refers to the human person's capacity for love. It indicates a heart dedicated entirely to the Lord, not divided by passions or desires contrary to Him. Since "the heart is the seat of moral personality" (CCC 2517), purity of heart means moral uprightness.

Yet purity of heart has a particularly close association with human sexuality—that essential aspect of the human person that "concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way, the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others" (CCC 2332). In this context, the Beatitude indicates specifically a heart purified of selfish or base sexual desires—a heart that does not view or desire another for selfish pleasure or gain. Purity of heart refers to the integration

of one's sexual desires and actions with the truth of human sexuality and genuine self-giving.

The Beatitude's second part describes the reward for the pure of heart: "they shall see God." Every Beatitude expresses some aspect of heaven—in this case, the vision of God. To "see God" has, first of all, a metaphorical meaning. It refers to the knowledge of God, the ability to "see" Him intellectually. Yet to "see God" or to possess the "vision of God" is not only an analogy of heaven. Rather, it has a profound literal sense as well. Because the human body will be raised on the last day, the just will literally "see" God with their own eyes. As such, to "see God" describes the ultimate longing of every human heart and the final purpose of human sight.

To "see God" describes the ultimate longing of every human heart and the final purpose of human sight.

The Incarnation of our Lord brings to man the ability to fulfill the desire to see God. In his Gospel, Saint John gives eloquent testimony to this: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). In his first letter also, Saint John bears witness to "that which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes" (1 John 1:1). In the Person of Jesus Christ, God speaks to man face to face—and man sees the face of God. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that our Lord came into the world precisely to enable us to see Him. Thus, in His healing of the blind (cf. Matthew 9:27-28; 12:22; Mark 8:22-23; John 9), He reveals that He has come to restore the original purpose of our sight. Most of all, by His death and resurrection, our Lord redeems us and thus enables us to enter heaven, into the very presence of God.

Saint John, in fact, equates the vision of God with salvation itself: "we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Through our sight of Him we become like Him. By gazing upon Him, we receive salvation. Thus does the Church speak of heaven as "the beatific vision"— that is, the vision that makes us blessed. Thus did Saint Irenaeus write, "The life of man is the vision of God." Here we see Him "in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Man's final purpose is caught up with his ability to see.

Drawing upon Scripture, the Church has continually reflected on this desire for and promise of the vision of God. She describes the virtue of faith as a way of seeing God and His truths. She describes contemplation—the height of prayer —in similar terms:

> Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. "I look at him and he looks at me": this is what a certain peasant of Ars in the time of his holy curé used to say while praying before the tabernacle. This focus on Jesus is a renunciation of self. His gaze purifies our heart; the light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all men. Contemplation also turns its gaze on the mysteries of the life of Christ. Thus it learns the "interior knowledge of our Lord, the more to love him and follow him." (CCC 2715)

This ability "to see" spiritually has implications for the moral life: "it enables us to see according to God, to accept others as 'neighbors'; it lets us perceive the human body—ours and our neighbor's—as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty" (CCC 2519).

Our sight, more than just a physical ability, serves as an important means for understanding faith, heaven and salvation. Indeed, its proper end and fulfillment is the vision of God Himself. Man's final purpose is caught up with his ability to see. With this profound truth in mind, we can better appreciate the grave threat pornography presents to the human soul, to the family and to society.

Takeaway Our power of sight is key to recognizing the image of God in others, and ultimately God Himself. Pornography corrupts this vision and deeply harms our spiritual faculties.

Practice Spend some time reflecting on your own yearning to "see God." Read and reflect on scripture passages that speak of the vision of God, such as those cited above.

Conclusion

We stand at a threshold—either we can continue to allow this plague to spread with fewer and fewer checks, or we can take concrete steps to uproot it in our lives, our families, our neighborhoods and our culture.

We are a people called to share in the pure and noble vision of God and His creation.

We are a people called to share in the pure and noble vision of God and His creation. We are also a people whose future glory has been bought with the precious sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must never forget the high cost of this purchase.

A free people can combat the tremendous moral, social and spiritual danger of pornography with great courage. My fervent prayer is that Catholics, other Christians, and all people of good will understand this threat, confront it, facilitate true healing, and ever more fully live out our God-given use of human sight.

LEFT: Saint Joseph and the infant Jesus, Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount-Royal, Montréal, Canada.

Study Guide

"A free people," writes Bishop Loverde, "can combat the tremendous moral, social and spiritual danger of pornography with great courage." The following suggested questions are intended to assist individuals, parish groups and ministries, and parents in applying the takeaways, practices, and tools outlined in *Bought with a Price*.

Questions are divided into three groups:

Individual

Parish Groups

Parents

For further tools, visit www.arlingtondiocese.org/purity

Introduction

1. Recognizing that everyone is tempted by lust at one time or another, what issues might I be avoiding that lead me to turn to lust in order to seek escape or relief? Do I see pornography or sex as a refuge from what's really bothering me?

2. Am I inclined to educate myself and others around me about the harms of pornography? Why or why not?

3. Do I look at pornographic material, even only occasionally? If so, am I aware of how it affects me in my daily interactions with others? Why do I continue to go down that path?

1. Are my fellow parishioners aware of the pornography epidemic in our culture? How has my parish attempted, in age-appropriate ways, to study the Church's teaching on the truth and meaning of human sexuality?

2. Are there forums in my parish such as men's groups or ministries where men can talk about the challenges of life, to share their ideas and concerns? Do I recognize that such fraternity and friendship can protect and strengthen my faith and help me to be spiritually and psychologically healthy?

1. Do we talk to our children about their problems? Do we create a culture and environment where our children can talk openly to us, or do we become prematurely argumentative, impatient, or dismissive?

The Current Threat

1. Pornography addiction and sexual problems in general worsen in a climate of isolation and hiddenness. Do I have a confessor and close Catholic friends with whom I can discuss my isolating tendencies? If I suspect I may have an addiction, have I sought competent psychological counseling that embraces the full truth of our sexuality as taught by the Church?

2. How does pornography isolate an individual from other people? What are some ways to re-establish contact with someone who has become isolated?

1. Bishop Loverde states that pornography "damages first of all the family," "injures the common good by producing a consumerist and licentious view of sexuality, particularly of women," and "worst of all, … damage[s] … man's 'template' for the supernatural." Studies show how quickly our moral life erodes when we act out sexually. What types of results do families experience when husbands and fathers "dabble" in pornography?

2. How might the secrecy inherent with the use of pornography be part of an unwillingness to discuss the topic? What is the source of the attitude that this behavior is harmless to me and to my family?

3. Is silence an implicit affirmation of pornography use? How might the prohibition of false witness in the eighth commandment (CCC 2464) be an incentive to break the silence on discussion of pornography?

1. What is our strategy to prevent the use of pornography in our home? Is it possible that the growing isolation of a particular family member could be fed—at least in part—by pornography use? Is someone acting secretively about their technology use? What other signs might alert us to possible use of pornography?

2. Is our technology equipped to shield our home from possible abuse of pornography or other illicit activity? Are Internet filters installed on our computers and have we put parental controls on cell phone accounts? Do our children have a computer and/or a TV in their bedroom? If we have not discussed these issues, where should we begin?

Four False Arguments

1. Four false arguments on pornography are stated in this section:

A) "There are no victims, so no one is being harmed."
B) "The temperate use of pornography can be therapeutic."
C) "Pornography can be an aid in maturing, both emotionally and sexually."
D) "Christian opposition to pornography comes from the Christian hatred of the body."

If one or more of these arguments has crept into my own thinking, how is my attitude changed after learning more of the facts about the effects of pornography?

2. Do I exhibit self-mastery in my life, not only with respect to pornography, but with other temptations (overeating, excessive alcohol, watching too much TV, etc.)? When I begin to falter in this self-mastery, what triggers can I recognize to avoid falling into sin?

3. How are the above-mentioned temptations that challenge self-mastery different from an addiction to pornography? How are they similar?

4. Do I believe that using pornography is gravely sinful? Why or why not? How does this affect my attitude towards the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

5. Do I understand that immoral "private actions" also have victims? Who are they?

1. Which of the four false arguments are the most prevalent in our culture? How can we refute these arguments? Which are the biggest temptations to me and why?

2. Restricting freedom by eliminating pornography results in greater freedom for the individual and all society. Why is this true?

1. If we suspect that one of our children is struggling with pornography, how might we approach this to begin to achieve a solution? What outside resources might be used with the child?

2. If a member of our family is addicted to pornography, what steps can we take to approach the matter effectively?

What Can Be Done

1. How can I help others to grow in awareness of the urgency of fighting the spread of pornography? Am I aware of any groups which help pornography users end their addiction?

2. Have I ever considered contacting my elected officials regarding the drafting and enforcement of anti-pornography laws? How might I become involved in protecting the public, including children, from the evil of pornography?

3. Do I see value in the regular use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, of fasting, and of seeking professional help when pornography seems overpowering?

4. How does prayer help in avoiding the occasion of sin in moments when a trigger surfaces, tempting one to indulge in a sinful act?

1. "…[Y]outh cannot control their natural desires and practice the virtue of chaste intimacy." How do you react to this "lie of immaturity"? How has this lie allowed you to let down your own defenses to pornography or other private sins?

2. How might a deeper prayer life, including prayer and fasting with regular use of confession and reception of the Eucharist, help to protect against the temptation to impurity?

3. Is there a stigma against seeking help for pornography addiction? If so, how can we help to remove this barrier for those seeking help?

1. How can we protect our children from the assault of pornography which comes to our family in nearly all media? Do we as a family talk openly about problems as a way of diminishing the lure of lust?

2. Are our children inclined to keep secrets that might include serious sin? How can we as parents keep lines of communication open so that dangerous secrets will become known early enough to take quick, effective action? Would our family be embarrassed to confront serious sin of any nature in our children? What can we do to create a climate of open discussion in the family?

3. What can we do to encourage our cable provider and our cell phone carrier to strengthen parental control options to protect children from pornography, and to help others do the same?

The Gift of Sight

1. Do I yearn to "see God"? Consider Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." Do I recognize that sin blinds me and that this sin in particular prevents me from fully seeing others and God?

2. Do I pray for strength to resist sexual sins in my own life? How am I tempted and how do I fight the temptations of the flesh? If I yield to these temptations, what interferes with my seeking the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Do I experience the joy of "seeing God" when I experience the consolation of God's forgiveness of my sins?

1. If I am a member of a men's group or women's group in my parish or elsewhere, has "purity of heart" ever been the topic of our conversation? How does striving for "purity of heart" help us to have a closer relationship with Jesus?

2. Does our parish participate in any activities that would address and help to fight the problem of pornography? How can groups in our parish, in age-appropriate ways, promote the truth and meaning of human sexuality?

1. Does our family have regular prayer together? Do we pray for each other and support each other as a family?

2. How does an attitude of forgiveness affect our ability to "see God" as a family? Describe your family's culture of forgiveness. Does forgiveness flow freely in our family? Do we feel free to approach one another with a loving and forgiving heart when conflict arises? Do I model forgiveness either by asking it of my children and spouse or freely offering it when someone has trespassed against me?

Conclusion

1. Consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." How is the sin of pornography particularly destructive?

2. How often do we consider the "price" Jesus paid for all of our sins, great and small? Does considering that price alter the way we think about our resolve to avoid future sin?

1. Do we consider that Jesus will help us to fight these problems and temptations, or do we tend to attempt to go after them on our own?

2. Other than praying about this, what concrete action steps are we going to take away from this reading?

1. "We stand at the threshold…" ready to take action. What steps can we take now to create a healthier family culture?

2. How often does our family go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) together? If our children attend Catholic school and confess there, do we still make a point to receive this sacrament together on occasion? Do we celebrate as a family after going to confession together? Is our family culture in need of improvement in the area of this sacrament?

Plan of Life

Sins against purity are discouraging and can lead to great frustration and self-hatred. You may feel a sense of helplessness and that these sins are impossible to overcome. But with God you need never despair. As much as you want to overcome this sin, you can be sure that your Father in Heaven desires this even more than you do. **You will win.** God knows you and all your failings. He loves you and wants you to be free. You only need to:

- Hope in God's help.
- Be open to His grace.
- Have a plan of life.
- Persevere.

The following suggested **Plan of Life** is intended to help men to draw closer to Jesus Christ and His Church. Many of these suggestions can also be found in Bishop Loverde's letter on the New Evangelization, *Go Forth with Hearts on Fire*. Such a plan will aid a man in defeating lust while it is still a distant threat. These are suggestions—a beginning, rather than a law written in stone. Remember that these are not mere "things to accomplish" but rather encounters with our loving Father.

Daily Practices

1. Morning Offering

As soon as you rise in the morning, make some kind of offering of the day to the Lord. A traditional offering is:

> *O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, in reparation for my sins, for the intentions of all my relatives and friends, and in particular for the intentions of the Holy Father. Amen.*

2. Scripture Reading / Spiritual Reading

Take about 20 minutes, divided between Scripture (the Gospel reading from daily Mass is a good place to start) and some other spiritual reading. It is good to do this at the beginning of the day. If a word or phrase stands out, write it down, keep it in your pocket, and read it throughout the day.

3. Meditation Time / Mental Prayer

Make a point to set aside some time in silence to be with the Lord. You can use what you read in Scripture or in your spiritual reading as a source for your meditation. Also take this time to speak to God about your life and to ask for His help and strength. If possible, do this in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament or before an image of Our Lord such as a Crucifix or picture of the Sacred Heart.

Here are some suggestions for prayers to be said at the beginning and end of your meditation time:

(Opening) My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that You are here, that You see me and that You hear me. I adore You with profound reverence, I ask for Your pardon for my sins, and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. Immaculate Mary, Saint Joseph, Guardian Angel, intercede for me.

(Closing) I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations which You have given to me in this time of prayer. I ask Your help to put them into effect. Immaculate Mary, Saint Joseph, Guardian Angel, intercede for me.

4. The Rosary

This can be prayed during some quiet time, during your commute, or on a walk. It is great to pray the rosary as a couple or as a family too.

5. Practice of the Presence of God

Make a habit throughout the day of turning your eyes toward God. You can fix certain times of the day or identify places to trigger these prayers. You might set up a calendar reminder on your computer at work, or have a small holy image on your desk to remind you. The idea here is recognizing that God is always with us and we need only take note of His Presence through short prayers throughout the day. Be creative with this.

6. Prayer Before Bed

Make a brief examination of conscience followed by an Act of Contrition or some other short prayer. Lust is parasitical on other emotions and moods. It generally does not gain power over us by itself but piggybacks on negative situations. Ask the help of the Holy Spirit to guide you:

- What were the circumstances prior to the fall into sin?
- What was your mood?
- Were you angry, frustrated, lonely or sad?
- How did you deal with these circumstances or feelings?

Make an Act of Entrustment to God, such as this:

> *My Lord and my God, into Your hands I abandon the past, the present, and the future, what is small and what is great, what amounts to little and what amounts to a lot, things temporal and things eternal.*

Weekly, Monthly, and Other Practices

- **Mass** on Sundays and Holy Days, more often if you can.
- Frequent **visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament**, in a church or chapel, even if only for a few minutes.
- Frequent **confession**, at least once a month. Having a regular confessor can be a great help.
- **Spiritual direction.** If you do not have a spiritual director and are seeking advice on what to look for, speak with your Pastor or other parish priest.

- A **silent retreat** once a year, for a day, weekend or even longer. There are many retreat centers offering private or directed retreats, and many monasteries have guest houses.

- **Pilgrimages** to holy sites, even locally. There are a number of beautiful shrines and other holy places within an easy drive of our own diocese. If you are able, consider a larger pilgrimage to Rome, the Holy Land, or some other place at least once in your lifetime.

- To remind you to be prayerful, tape a **holy image** to or near your computer monitor or set religious art as your wallpaper.

- **Install filters or a monitoring system** on your computer. Use your computer in public areas of the home with your door always open.

- **Use the Internet with purpose.** Say a prayer as you go onto the Internet and throughout your use. Know what you want, get it as quickly as possible, and log off.

- When you are experiencing temptation, say **short prayers** multiple times. Parts of the Our Father and Hail Mary are helpful as well as invocations of Jesus, Mary, Joseph or other saints and angels. An example of an invocation would be, "Jesus, save me" or "Mary, help me."

Bishop Paul S. Loverde

Bishop Loverde was ordained a priest on December 18, 1965, and a Bishop in 1988. In 1999, he was appointed by Pope John Paul II as the third Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, which encompasses twenty-one counties and seven independent cities in the northern tier of Virginia. A native of Pawcatuck, Connecticut, Bishop Loverde says of his life as a priest, **"All I've ever wanted to do is lead people to Jesus."**

Bishop Loverde presents the Spanish-language version of his recent pastoral letter, Go Forth with Hearts on Fire, *to Pope Francis on Feb. 12, 2014, following the general audience at Saint Peter's Basilica.*

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